

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**  
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**  
123<sup>rd</sup> Meeting  
Geneva, 8 July 2022

**EXCOM/CONCLU/123**

**CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS**

123<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee  
8 July 2022

**FORMAL SEGMENT**

Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda.

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 123<sup>rd</sup> meeting was adopted.
2. The Chair informed EXCOM that she had received a request from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary to address the EXCOM outside of the agenda and proposed that the meeting be paused in order to hear this address.
3. The meeting resumed following the address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary.

Item 2 – Chair’s conclusions from the last meeting.

4. The conclusions from the 122<sup>nd</sup> meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/122) were adopted.

Item 3 - Update on Special Procedures during the COVID-19 period

5. The Secretary of the Commission informed that, since the last meeting of EXCOM, 15 silence procedures had been concluded between 3 May and 8 July 2022 related to formal meetings with remote participation. (These were the 86th session of the Working Party on Lighting and Light-Signalling; 78th session of the Working Party on the Transport of Perishable Foodstuffs; 71st session of the Working Party on Passive Safety; Special session of the Committee on Environmental Policy; 111th session of the Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods; 3rd session of the Group of Experts on drafting a new legal instrument on the use of automated vehicles in traffic; 13th session of the Working Party on Automated/Autonomous and Connected Vehicles; 17th meeting of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development; 86th session of the Working Party on Pollution and Energy; 43rd session of Joint UNECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management; 160th session of the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport; 15th session of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships; 187th session of the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations; 70th plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians; 7th annual session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standardization.) The silence had not been broken for any of them and their respective decisions were thus considered adopted.

Item 4 - Latest developments in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe

6. The Chair recalled that this item had also been included in the agenda of the 121<sup>st</sup> meeting of EXCOM, where member States had adopted decision ECE/EX/2022/L.6. She invited EXCOM to consider draft decisions ECE/EX/2022/L.12 and ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1, which

had been submitted as follow up to ECE/EX/2022/L.6 by the delegation of Ukraine, co-sponsored by the delegation of the European Union and its member States.

7. The representative of Ukraine introduced the contents of his proposal, noting that it allowed for resumption of all extrabudgetary projects whose implementation had been put on hold following the adoption of ECE/EX/2022/L.6, except the project ECE-E390. For the latter, he needed further information concerning the sources of funding and related due diligence to confirm that involved entities were not linked to activities undermining the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. He proposed that member States consider only ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1.

8. The representative of the European Union and its member States expressed solidarity for the people of Ukraine and condemned in the strongest possible terms the military aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Being the largest donors of UNECE, the European Union and its member States wished to maintain an open channel of communications to prevent the risk of reputational damage to the organization and to prevent their funds from being linked in any way to the above-mentioned military aggression. She noted that, as project ECE-E390 had been approved in December 2021 and no contract had been signed yet, the adoption of ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1 would not disrupt any ongoing activity.

9. The representative of the Russian Federation viewed the proposed decision as the continuation of a policy by Ukraine and the European Union and its member States that could lead to the destruction of UNECE as a forum for cooperation based on equality and mutual benefit. She noted that a number of measures contained in the draft decision were discriminatory vis-à-vis the Russian Federation, which violated the first paragraph of the Terms of Reference of UNECE, and thought that the arguments to suspend implementation of the extrabudgetary project ECE-E390 were without merit. She also said that the screening of extrabudgetary projects was not useful, as the projects financed by the Russian Federation were always focused on development and cooperation. The Russian Federation did not oppose the resumption of the released projects, but objects to the adoption of the draft decision due to the discriminatory references to the Russian Federation and to decision ECE/EX/2022/L.6 which the Russian Federation considered illegitimate, and the additional administrative burden caused by the screening of projects.

10. The representative of the United States said that the draft decision did not aim to create any additional burden but merely to increase communication between member States and the secretariat, in order to resolve quickly and without cumbersome processes any issues that might arise.

11. The representative of Belarus categorically rejected the politicization of the work of UNECE and called on EXCOM to carefully consider the adverse effects of such politicization on international cooperation for sustainable development. In line with article 1 of the Terms of Reference of UNECE and Rule 40 of the Rules of Procedure, Belarus opposed any decisions brought forward on political grounds with the aim of discriminating against Belarus or other countries in the region.

12. The representative of the United Kingdom supported the draft decision and the positions of the representatives of the European Union and its member States and the United States, and expressed solidarity with Ukraine. It was fundamentally important that no activity of UNECE be linked to actions undermining the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. She noted

that the review of extrabudgetary projects following the adoption of ECE/EX/2022/L.6 had opened a useful channel of communications, which she hoped would be maintained and would enhance best practice and transparency. In the absence of consensus, she proposed that EXCOM vote on the draft decision.

13. The representative of the European Union and its member States thought that the references to the UNECE Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure made by the representatives of the Russian Federation and Belarus were without relevance, as the draft decision did not single out any member State but merely referred a General Assembly resolution. Furthermore, the draft decision did not introduce any action to be taken against a UNECE member State. She therefore aligned with the representative of the United Kingdom and called for a vote by roll call on the draft decision.

14. The Chair confirmed that the meeting had a quorum with more than one third of the membership present, and asked EXCOM to vote on draft decision ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1. By a recorded vote of 32 to 0, with 2 abstentions, ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1 was adopted. The voting was as follows:

*In favour:*

Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America

*Against:*

None

*Abstaining:*

Armenia, Serbia

## **INFORMAL SEGMENT**

### Item 5 - Preparations for the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe

15. The Chair proposed that the 70<sup>th</sup> session of UNECE be held on 18-19 April 2023.

16. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the status of the preparations for the 70<sup>th</sup> session, as outlined in informal document 2022/19, and invited EXCOM to consider the related draft decision contained therein.

17. The representative of the European Union and its member States said that the chosen cross-cutting theme was of great importance. The session should not ignore the ongoing unprovoked and unjustified aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the implications thereof on the global implementation of the SDGs. The European Union and its member States wished to avoid explicit calls for or sessions dedicated to voluntary commitments linked to the theme of the session, as this could lead to additional reporting obligations or parallel reporting lines. Member States who wished to do so could instead share relevant information in their national statements.

18. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the proposed dates and believed that, given the removal of COVID-19 related restrictions, the session should be held in person. The Russian Federation would take active part in the informal consultations on the high-level statement.

19. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes notes with appreciation of the information update on the preparation of the seventieth session of the Commission, presented by the secretariat in informal document 2022/19, and looks forward to receiving further periodic update on related issues. Pursuant to Rules 1 and 2 of the Rules of Procedure of the Commission, EXCOM decides to hold the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe on 18-19 April 2023 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Subject to available resources, EXCOM decides to hold the session in hybrid format and encourages delegations to consider providing the necessary extrabudgetary funds for related support services. EXCOM requests the secretariat to convene informal consultations starting in early October 2022 to continue joint preparations of the 70th session, in line with the roadmap and proposed timeline presented by the secretariat in informal document 2022/19. EXCOM encourages the membership of UNECE to explore how they may contribute to the high-level theme of the seventieth session (“Digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the UNECE region”) to inform further programme planning.

#### Item 6 – Annual report on technical cooperation activities, 2021.

20. The Executive Secretary presented the 2021 Annual Report on Technical Cooperation Activities to EXCOM for its information, noting that the report also contained revised resource mobilization plans for 2021-2023, pursuant to the approval of the revised Resource Mobilization Strategy by EXCOM on 29 May 2020. Overall extrabudgetary contributions had decreased by about 7 per cent in 2020 to USD 18.5 million, with 64 per cent being provided by member States and 12 per cent by the European Commission.

21. The representative of the European Union and its member States noted that technical cooperation had remained relatively stable despite the crisis caused by COVID-19. Collectively, the European Union and its member States contributed more than half of all extrabudgetary funding. She appreciated the focus given in technical cooperation to environment and transport, which were priority areas for the European Union. She requested information on the beneficiaries of technical cooperation activities by country. She further noted that actual expenditure related to the achievement of SDG 5 was below 1 per cent. In light of the importance the European Union attaches to gender equality, she requested further information on the concrete contributions of UNECE to achieving SDG 5 through specific projects as well as through mainstreaming the topic in all extrabudgetary projects.

22. The representative of Switzerland appreciated the work on technical cooperation and highlighted in particular the activities under the Statistics division, which were of great interest to Switzerland. He noted the significant participation at the recent session of the Conference of European Statisticians and thanked the Director of the UNECE Statistics division for her leadership.

23. The representative of the Russian Federation regretted the current politicization of the work of UNECE, which also affected technical cooperation and had become a serious obstacle to the continued financing of projects. The unfortunate effects of the adoption of

ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1 by EXCOM would impact recipients of aid in the CIS and Central Asian countries.

24. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note with appreciation of the annual report on technical cooperation activities 2021 as contained in informal document 2022/20.

Item 7 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

25. The representative of the Russian Federation did not oppose the implementation of the projects submitted for the consideration of EXCOM, except for the project contained in informal document 2022/23. However, she believed that the secretariat had to present an evaluation of these projects in line with ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1 before EXCOM could proceed to adopt them. She opposed the project contained in informal document 2022/23 as it used the term “war” which did not accurately reflect the ongoing situation in Ukraine, and highlighted that diplomatic and economic relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation continued. Moreover, project activities would be carried out in Donetsk and Lougansk People’s Republic, which had been recognized by the Russian Federation and could not be considered part of Ukraine. As the special operation carried out by the Russian Federation in Ukraine had yet to be completed, she thought there was no benefit to the proposed study on the feasibility of biofuel production.

26. The representative of the United States said that, according to his understanding of ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1, no evaluation was needed for any future projects other than ECE-E390. He noted that the autonomy of Donetsk and Lougansk was not recognized by the United Nations or by any countries apart from the Russian Federation, and that the project contained in informal document 2022/23, thus would take place in Ukrainian territory.

27. The representative of the European Union and its member States said that, according to her understanding of ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1, what was requested from the secretariat was an exchange of information during the implementation of extrabudgetary projects, rather than any evaluation or assessment, and hoped the representative of the Russian Federation could clarify her request.

28. The representative of the Russian Federation said that, in accordance with ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1, the secretariat had to provide a review of projects, including projects approved after the date of the current meeting, and wished to consider the projects currently tabled for approval (with the exception of 2022/23) after the completion of this review.

29. The representative of the European Union and its member States explained that ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1 simply requested regular updates by the Project Management Unit of the online overview table containing information on all approved extrabudgetary projects, without needing any evaluation or assessment. She supported all the projects tabled for approval.

30. The representative of Ukraine supported all the projects tabled for approval and rejected claims by the Russian Federation related to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.

31. Following the clarification provided, the representative of the Russian Federation

expressed readiness to approve the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2022/21, 2022/22, 2022/24 and 2022/25, on the understanding that relevant information would be uploaded on the UNECE website.

32. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2022/21, 2022/22, 2022/24 and 2022/25. She said she would consult with the Bureau on how to move forward on the project proposal contained in informal document 2022/23.

#### Item 8 - Briefing by the Executive Secretary: Important new developments and key upcoming events.

33. The Executive Secretary, complemented by the Deputy Executive Secretary, informed EXCOM about the following recent events:

- **9-12 May, Geneva:** Special Session of the Committee on Environmental Policy dedicated to the preparations for the 9<sup>th</sup> Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October)
- **11-13 May, Vienna:** Spring session of the Chief Executives Board
- **25-27 May, Geneva:** 15<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and PPPs
- **2-3 June, Sweden:** Stockholm+50
- **6-7 June, Dushanbe:** Second International High-Level Conference on the International Action Decade “Water for Sustainable Development” 2018-2028
- **7-12 June, Dushanbe, Tashkent, Nursultan, Almaty, Bishkek:** Mission by the Executive Secretary to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as part of the delegation of the Deputy-Secretary-General on her state visit to these countries
- **16-17 June, Rome:** UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing
- **23-24 June, Geneva:** Extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention to elect Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders.
- **26-30 June, Katowice:** 11<sup>th</sup> session of the World Urban Forum
- **30 June, Tallinn:** Anniversary event to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Water Convention
- **30 June – 1 July, New York:** UN High-Level Meeting on Road Safety and a High-Level Pledging Event for the UN Road Safety Fund.

34. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that nominations were being solicited to fill a vacant seat on the Advisory Board of the UN Road Safety Fund with a representative of the UNECE region, and encouraged delegations to forward their nominations to the secretariat by the end of the month.

35. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about her upcoming trip to New York to attend the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

#### Item 9 – Any other business

36. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that the Chair would soon take up a new position away from Geneva and thanked the Chair for her able leadership of EXCOM over the

past year. She also thanked several delegations who were likewise leaving Geneva for new assignments.

37. The Chair thanked the membership for the honor and the privilege of serving as the Chair of the Commission and informed that her successor would be taking over this role in September. She noted that ECE was a remarkable organization with a notable track record. She regretted that multilateralism was in a sad state since February 24<sup>th</sup> and hoped that there would be better days and multilateralism and diplomacy would soon be used again to resolve problems. In closing, the Chair thanked all delegates, the Executive Secretary and the Deputy Executive Secretary for their personal cooperation and expressed special appreciation for the dedicated work of and close collaboration with the Secretary of the Commission.

38. The Chair informed delegations that the next EXCOM meeting would be held on 30 September in the afternoon.

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